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THE LIBERALS REACT TO HERPES

"Herpes Isn't Funny Any More." "Sex No Fun Any More." "Apology Not Enough For Herpes." "Sexual Revolution Slows." "Is Disease Shaping a New Sexual Ethic?" "The Fear That Made Abstinence Famous."

Those are just a few of the headlines that have appeared in the last several months since the media suddenly discovered that 20 million Americans have the incurable venereal disease called Herpes. Watching how the liberals handle this subject offers a good lesson in their attitudes and techniques.

The first thing one notices about the articles is a compulsive reluctance to admit where Herpes comes from. This peculiar shrinking from the obvious is far and away more intense than oldtime Victorian reluctance to talk in public about where babies come from. Does the stork bring Herpes? Does it just appear spontaneously in the night when the lights are out? Naughty, naughty; it isn't nice to say how one acquires Herpes.

Is this because powerful forces have a vested commercial interest in promiscuity? These profitable enterprises include abortion clinics, contraceptive manufacturers, sex educationists, and the hard- and soft-porn magazines, movies and TV programs. Those profitable enterprises must be terrified that the Herpes epidemic will reverse the sexual revolution and spin their businesses into a depression.

A magazine widely used in junior high schools recently devoted two pages to a discussion of Venereal Herpes. It concluded with a section on "What can I do to stop the spread of Herpes?" Among the nine methods given were: "washing your hands," "avoiding tight jeans," "wearing all-cotton underwear," and "never using saliva to lubricate your contact lenses."

But the list did not include any advice <u>not</u> to engage in sex, even though the readers of this magazine are all unmarried, very young teenagers. Yet, the one best way to avoid contracting incurable Herpes is to remain a virgin, marry a virgin, and remain faithful to each other.

Many liberal columnists are very angry at traditional moralists for saying that. But that advice doesn't come only from stodgy puritans. On ABC Nightline, Ted Koppel gave every opportunity to the "other side" when he interviewed Samuel Knox, national program director of the American Social Health Association and developer of Herpes Resource Center Programs all around the country.

But here is what he said: "If people absolutely never want to get Herpes, and they don't have it to begin with, they should simply just stop having sex. If they want to take the next best step -- well, an absolutely monogamous relationship among two people neither of whom have Herpes is a barrier to the introduction of Herpes into that relationship. Anything short of that, you introduce an element of risk."

Koppel then asked him if there is any way of knowing if the other person has Herpes. Knox replied, "You have to rely on a stranger's honesty."

That isn't much protection against a disease for which there is no vaccine and no cure. A Fort Lauderdale woman has sued her lover for $100,000 saying that he gave her Herpes after telling her that he didn't have it. "This has changed my life tremendously," the plaintiff said. "A million dollars wouldn't compensate for what it's done."

Some advocates of the sexual revolution are trying to promote the idea that Herpes is normal and even fashionable because "everybody" has it like the common cold. Dating services for Herpes sufferers advertise for business by telling prospective clients that they are "intelligent, attractive, successful people" who simply need help in meeting other "attractive individuals without ever having to apologize or explain."

Germaine Greer, author of one of the original "classics" of women's liberation, "The Female Eunuch," wrote a column in London's Sunday Times in 1973 entitled "It's time VD was socially accepted." She argued, "I wish at this point I could announce publicly I had had a venereal disease." She could get her wish now.

Is Herpes changing American lifestyles? The Washington Post-ABC News public opinion poll discovered that the answer is yes. More than half of young, unmarried Americans who consider themselves vulnerable to Herpes are changing their sexual behavior to avoid catching it. In addition, three-fourths of those surveyed think there should be a required Herpes test before marriage.